

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 26 June 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 26 June 2018 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Debono (Chair), Cutler (Vice-Chair), Bell-Bradford, Ismail, Spall, Woolf and Woodbyrne

Co-opted Members: Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese
James Stephenson, Secondary Parent Governor

Also Present: Cllr Caluori, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ngongo.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

3 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2018 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

5 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting.

It was noted that this would be the last meeting for the current Parent Governor representatives, James Stephenson and Erol Baduna, and the Chair thanked them for their contribution.

6 ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. A6)

None.

7 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

None.

CHILD PROTECTION ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B3)

Laura Eden, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, introduced the report, which summarised the council's child protection work over the previous year.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- In 2017/18 Islington's services for children in need of help and protection had been inspected by Ofsted, and they were found to be 'good' with outstanding features. This provided assurance that council services were effective, however officers noted concern that the demand for services was increasing.
- The Committee requested a glossary of services or diagram detailing the teams working with vulnerable children and families, and what types of issues each team deals with.
- A member expressed concern that representatives from a child's school would not attend child protection conferences held during school holidays. In response, officers advised that it was helpful for school representatives to attend such meetings, however, it was important for child protection conferences to be held as soon as possible if there was a significant risk to the child.
- The Committee noted that 11,819 contacts had been made to Children's Services over the past year. Officers commented that the majority of these were made by the Police, and the most frequent reasons for a referral were domestic violence and/or neglect. Children's Services had a single 'front door' for services, and this was publicised via the council's website, as well as through safeguarding training, and through local professional networks.
- The Committee requested further details of the serious case review detailed in the report. In response, it was advised that a report would be published in future when a related criminal case ended. It was advised that the service had learned from the case, particularly in relation to consent for providing services and absenteeism.
- Officers highlighted the difficulties associated with finding appropriate placements for looked after children. This was exacerbated by a national shortage of foster carers. It was noted that the Council was seeking to recruit foster carers in partnership with other boroughs.
- The Committee queried the support available to staff working with vulnerable children. In response, it was reported that a survey of front-line staff found that staff felt supported by management, and by the culture of the organisation, which was focused on professional learning.
- A member of the public queried how the council worked with the Police and local press around appeals for missing children. In response, it was advised that the Police were responsible for publicity related to missing children, and the risk to the young person was assessed before publishing information about them. It was commented that some missing children may respond to publicity by further distancing themselves, and putting themselves in greater danger.

RESOLVED:

That the headline performance outcomes, governance arrangements for safeguarding children, and the findings of quality assurance activities, be noted.

9 **MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND DATES OF MEETINGS (ITEM NO. B1)**

The Committee requested that the Council consider the possibility of appointing a representative of Muslim schools to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the membership, terms of reference, and dates of meetings be noted.

10 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER ANNUAL PRESENTATION (ITEM NO. B2)**

Councillor Caluori, Executive Member for Children, Young People, and Families, presented to the Committee. The presentation focused on youth crime performance and school results.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Youth Crime plan was launched one year ago. Councillor Caluori summarised the progress of the Integrated Gangs Team and the Youth Offending Service over this time, noting that the ISS service, which provided an intensive alternative to custody, was showing signs of success.
- Trauma informed training was provided to teachers and youth workers. Councillor Caluori had attended a training session and commented on the importance of supporting children who had adverse childhood experiences.
- It was thought that the additional investment in youth services had a positive impact on youth crime performance. Islington had its smallest youth offending service cohort since 2010, and youth violence had slightly decreased, compared to a London-wide overall increase.
- Councillor Caluori was pleased with the progress the Youth Offending Service had made since its previous inspections, which had rightly highlighted the service's inadequacies. It was expected that the service would be the subject of a further inspection in the near future.
- Although snatch theft offences had increased over the past year, there had been a significant 60% decrease since the introduction of Operation Gondola in January 2018.
- The Integrated Gangs Team included representatives of both the Police and the Council and offered young people support; including access to mental health support, gang exit advice, caseworkers, and educational psychologists. The team had been highlighted as an example of good practice in the national and local press. Data indicated that the team was having a positive impact.
- The Council has commissioned the St Giles Trust to support young people in exiting gangs. Although only 5 of the 68 young people engaged in the service had confirmed that they had exited gangs, it was commented that this was a slow process and the offending rate of participants had decreased.
- Councillor Caluori commented on the importance of disrupting the local drugs market that was fuelling gang violence and other offending.
- The number of violent street robberies had increased, these often involved young people armed with knives following adults from transport hubs and seizing their laptops, phones and wallets. The council was requesting that the Police place greater emphasis on disrupting this activity, however it was appreciated that this was challenging due to limited Police resources.
- Councillor Caluori was pleased with the progress of Islington schools, and commented on the importance of supporting all pupils to achieve their potential.

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- The Committee expressed concern that the number of exclusions in Islington primary and secondary schools was above the Inner London average. Councillor Caluori noted that there was an unequal distribution of exclusions between schools; some schools regularly excluded pupils, whereas others hardly ever excluded pupils. It was commented that this inconsistency could be a source of frustration for parents, and it was important for schools to have a transparent exclusions policy.
- The Committee queried why some schools appeared to be more ready to exclude pupils than others. In response, it was thought that some schools did not seek support on managing behaviour or implement effective interventions at an early enough stage.
- It was commented that, although excluded pupils exhibited very disruptive behaviour, this could sometimes be triggered by an adverse or traumatic experience and their behaviour may be out of character. It was thought that such pupils should be offered comprehensive support.
- In response to a question, it was commented that cuts to Police resources had resulted in significant reductions to neighbourhood policing. Safer Neighbourhood Teams were previously comprised of 3 PCSOs, 3 PCs and one Sergeant; however, they were now comprised of 2 PCSOs and half a PC per area. It was noted that reductions in Police resources appeared to correlate to an increase in violent crime, and that effective neighbourhood policing had the potential to disrupt gang activity and serious youth violence.
- It was queried if Islington Council would be making use of powers to evict families in social housing where the children were offending or involved in gang activity. In response, it was advised that such powers must not be used disproportionately, however the threat of eviction could be an effective tool in the small number of cases where parents were colluding with young offenders or actively supporting or profiting from their activities. The Committee noted that some young people could be coerced into gang activity, so such powers had to be used cautiously. It was commented that the council had to be transparent about how it would exercise such powers, and the Committee noted concerns that eviction of a family could result in an increase in offending.
- A member of the public asked what percentage of schools had visited the Ben Kinsella Trust knife crime exhibition. In response, it was confirmed that all schools had attended the exhibition at least once.

The Committee thanked Councillor Caluori for his attendance.

11 **EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B4)**

Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools, introduced the report that summarised education performance in 2017.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Officers were concerned that Black Caribbean and White Working Class pupils were not achieving the same level of educational attainment as their peers. Officers had previously thought that such inequalities would reduce once all schools in the borough were good or outstanding, however this had not happened, and it was a concern that these issues persisted. It was commented that other boroughs did not have attainment gaps to the same extent, and further work was needed to support Black Caribbean and White Working Class pupils and reduce inequalities.
- Officers were concerned that Islington had higher rates of persistent absence and exclusion than the Inner London average. It was intended to have formal

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structured discussions with head teachers around these issues, as the council wanted schools to make significant and quick progress in these areas.

- Further exclusions data would be available in late July. It was hoped that this would indicate a reduction in exclusions.
- Officers were pleased with progress on Education Health and Care Plans for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- A member expressed disappointment that the School's Equalities Conference scheduled for 28 June had been cancelled due to poor attendance. Officers shared this disappointment and the matter had been raised with head teachers, however, it was also acknowledged that holding such a conference immediately before the summer break may not have been appropriate. Even though the conference had been cancelled, officers would be raising equalities issues with head teachers before the summer break, with a view to detailed work taking place in September.
- The Committee queried if Islington schools had after-school clubs or activities focused on improving the attainment of Black Caribbean and White Working Class pupils. In response, it was advised that provision varied from school to school, and schools may need to review the provision they offer. A member noted that a targeted initiative called the Shine Academy was previously held for young black boys and it was suggested that such initiatives may be successful.
- In response to a question, it was advised that officers would be holding clear and structured meetings with head teachers and governors to discuss exclusions. Officers would share their questions in advance of the session to allow schools to prepare. It was noted that excluded pupils often experienced disadvantage, and may be experiencing poverty and issues with their social, emotional and mental health.
- Officers commented on the need to reinforce the importance of attendance among some parents.
- The Committee requested that further exclusions and attendance data be reported to members when it becomes available.
- The Committee suggested that the council could learn from other boroughs that do not experience the same equalities issues, and rates of exclusion and persistent absence. In response, it was advised that officers regularly networked with colleagues across Inner London, however also looked to learn from schools in the borough that did not experience the same issues to the same extent.
- It was suggested that supplementary schools could have a role in supporting equalities in attainment.
- The Committee commented on the importance of giving young people opportunities and role models, and in helping them access further education and employment.
- The Committee requested that detailed comparative data on attainment and exclusions be included in a future report.
- Anthony Doudle, Head of School Improvement (Primary) provided an overview of his work with five primary schools to implement trauma informed practices. It was reported that four primary schools had successfully incorporated trauma informed practices, and reported that this had a positive impact on their work.
- In response to a question from a member of the public, it was advised that take-up of funded early years places for two-year olds was high compared to the rest of London, but low compared to the rest of the country. At present 68% of parents took up the offer, however work was underway to increase this further.
- A member of the public asked a question on establishing 'Forest School' approaches in Islington. In response, it was noted that some schools already

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held Forest School or 'Garden Classroom' sessions. Work was underway to develop such schemes further.

The Committee thanked officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the Education Annual Report be noted.

12 SCRUTINY TOPICS AND WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19 (ITEM NO. B5)

The Committee selected 'supporting pupil attendance and minimising the number of exclusions' as its scrutiny topic for the year.

The Committee requested one-off reports on support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, the implementation of the Fair Futures Commission recommendations, the role of Islington's supplementary schools, and the effectiveness of Islington Council's Free School Meals policy.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the work plan for 2018/19 be agreed, and that reports on support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, the implementation of the Fair Futures Commission recommendations, the role of Islington's supplementary schools, and the effectiveness of Islington Council's Free School Meals policy be requested;
- (ii) That the main scrutiny topic for the year will be 'supporting pupil attendance and minimising the number of exclusions'.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.10 pm

Chair